

University of Toronto
Faculty of Music



ORFORD STRING QUARTET

(QUARTET-IN-RESIDENCE)

ANDREW DAWES, *violin*

TERENCE HELMER, *viola*

KENNETH PERKINS, *violin*

MARCEL ST-CYR, *cello*

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1976 AT 3 P.M.
WALTER HALL, EDWARD JOHNSON BUILDING

String Quartet, Op 18, No. 4 in C minor

Beethoven

Allegro ma non tanto

Scherzo. Andante scherzoso quasi Allegretto

Menuetto. Allegretto

Allegro

Beethoven's early contribution to the string quartet literature consists of the six quartets included in Op 18. Although they lack the breadth of conception to be found in most of the later quartets, they reveal his mastery of the classical language inherited from Haydn and Mozart. The set dates from the Vienna years 1798 to 1800, and was published in 1801 with a dedication to Prince von Lobkowitz, a friend of Beethoven and ardent devotee of music.

No.4 is the only quartet of the series composed in the minor mode. The first movement begins with an expansive melody in the first violin which is punctuated by detached fortissimo chords. Chords of this type are employed later in the movement for modulatory purposes. A second lyrical melody in contrasting relative major tonality is related rhythmically to the first. In the development they appear against varying harmonic and contrapuntal backgrounds which demonstrate Beethoven's unlimited resourcefulness. Following the recapitulation, the transition to the coda recalls the bounding syncopations of the unison passage heard earlier.

Beethoven experimented with the traditional types and arrangement of movements by inserting a wispy Scherzo rather than the expected slow movement at this point. The Scherzo combines the techniques of fugate writing with those of sonata form. The movement begins contrapuntally by introducing the rhythmically ambiguous theme in each instrument. The flavour of its initial repeated notes permeates the entire movement, even the more lyrical secondary theme. The alternation of linear and vertical textures is accomplished with ease.

The third movement is a surprisingly sombre and passionate minuet. Its predominantly restless tone is enforced by the insistent sforzandi accents on the third beat of the bar. Chromatic writing adds to the intensity of the second section. The trio provides relief in the form of a mischievous dialogue between the second violin and the viola.

A clear-cut, sectional rondo form is employed for the finale. A gypsy like tune furnishes the recurrent refrain. During the first episode the melodic interest is sustained by the second violin. The second episode is contrastingly gruff and terse. An extended coda reintroduces the melody from the first episode in serene C major. The form is rounded off by a prestissimo statement of the main theme.

String Quartet No 1, Op. 7

Lento

Bartók

Allegretto

Introduzione: Allegro vivace

The six quartets of Béla Bartók are deservedly recognized as one of the most original and significant contributions to the history of the genre. Striking in their innovations, they have exerted a lasting influence on twentieth-century musical thought. The wealth of techniques employed show a fertility of imagination which has rarely been surpassed by other composers.

The First String Quartet (1908) coincides with the period during which Bartók was first exposed to the folk tunes of his native Hungary. The pace gradually quickens from the double canon of the slow introduction to the vivace dance rhythms of the finale. The three movements are performed without interruption, and they are centered (tonally) around the note A.

The canonic procedure from the opening of the first movement is not maintained beyond the entrance of the lower instruments. Bartók freely expands his contrapuntal materials. The middle section of the movement is dominated by the impassioned melody of the viola. The return of the opening material builds to an expressive fortissimo climax.

A smooth transition to the second, sonata-like movement is effected by the concluding three notes of the first. From these thirds evolve a single four-note motif which has been cited as the unifying device of the entire work. It appears unadorned in the viola and 'cello at the beginning of the second movement. New thematic material consists of a descending succession of three notes perched above a rhythmic ostinato. A second thematic complex presents a waltz-like inner theme which is also supported by an ostinato figure.

Bartók chose to link the second and third movements with a concerted cadenza executed in rubato fashion by the 'cello. The allegro finale is more typical of the later Bartók we have grown to admire. The conspicuous fourths in the melodies, the percussive repetition of single notes, and the twisting ornamentation of the fugato subject suggest a native origin. The integrating four-note motif is here expanded to six. A second major motif, consisting of a descending minor second followed by a descending minor third, undergoes a series of variations before it is finally inverted. This became one of Bartók's favourite procedures. The work draws to an agitated conclusion imperceptibly generated from its subdued beginning.

String Quartet, Op.44, No.1 in D Major
Molto Allegro vivace
Menuetto. Un poco Allegretto
Andante espressivo ma con moto
Presto con brio

Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn was suffering from nervous exhaustion as a result of his hectic schedule of public commitments when he began working on the three string quartets of the years 1837-38. Published as Op.44, the set is generally regarded today as his crowning achievement in the medium. The composer's preference for the D major quartet is expressed in a July 1838, letter to his friend Ferdinand David the violinist: "I have just finished my third quartet, in D major, and like it very much ... it is more spirited and seems to me likely to be more grateful to the players than the others."

Mendelssohn's particular fondness for this quartet may account for the prominent initial position it enjoys in the set. It is undeniably the most conservative of the three owing much to the classical models of Haydn. Every movement except the second is conceived in sonata form. His extreme sensitivity to idiomatic string writing and contrasting sonorities is displayed throughout the music. The dramatic gesture of the fiery opening, with its arpeggiated violin figure soaring high above a tremelando accompaniment, yields to a less vigorous subsidiary theme employing closer intervals in the minor mode. An elaborate development section concerns itself not only with the exuberant opening theme but also the smooth linking figures which lend themselves so well to contrapuntal treatment. The quadruple stretto must be viewed as the highlight of an otherwise conventional recapitulation & coda.

The second movement, a minuet, features elegant cadential extensions of the flowing thematic material. Part-writing in thirds & sixths contributes to the general pleasing effect of the music. The trio, written in the contrasting relative minor key, is clearly divided into three sections. In the first & last ones a solo violin is poised above a drop bass accompaniment in the manner of a Baroque musette. The middle section is of more linear interest. An unabashedly romantic slow movement follows. From the exquisite melody of the opening, through the subtle harmonic variations and counter-melodies it generates, this is Mendelssohn at his lyrical finest.

The brilliant finale is a bustling saltarello reminiscent of the conclusion to Mendelssohn's "Italian Symphony" (1831). The speed indicated calls for the highest degree of proficiency on the part of the performers.